

Homily, Sunday 11 August 2019 - Elizabeth McConnell

I grew up with Billy Connolly as one of our family's frequent viewing. His was the only entertainment that my parents allowed which included swearing. One of my favourite bits from that time was how he talks about the way he worries. "I worry like a movie star," he says. Lying in bed, as he dramatically tosses his head from side to side as he worries.

Our world is geared to cater towards people's worries, but more than that, it is geared to keeping us worried, and creating new ones. We can worry about very important things, like housing and food, and we can worry about little things like, "what does my email address say about me?" Which is something I honestly worried about very recently.

Our culture keeps our Heads, Hearts and Hands full of trivial worries and concerns telling us that if we just buy this new thing, invest in this self-help book, all our worries will be over. Until next time...

Luke's imperative to his readers not to fear is very difficult. Jesus is talking to the disciples and to a large crowd that has gathered near where he was eating with a group of Pharisees and lawyers. They have had a large debate, or rather, Jesus has scolded them all, and now he leaves only to find this crowd of (according to Luke) thousands waiting for him. Luke writes many of Jesus sayings down in this long discourse about setting our priorities straight.

In today's reading Jesus is telling the people not to fear. Why?

Because it is God's *good pleasure* to give us the kingdom.

What does Jesus tell us to do?

Sell our possessions and give alms.

I'm not sure about you, but on the surface of it, that is not going to help me not to worry. This verse pre-empted Jesus' interaction with the rich man, in ch. 18, who asked what he must do to inherit eternal life. After being shown to be a faithful man, Jesus says: "Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

There is an important similarity and an important difference between the two sets of imperatives. Firstly, the difference: In our reading today, Jesus says to sell our possessions. In 18 he tells the rich man, sell *ALL that he has* so that he can follow Jesus in his itinerant ministry. The selling of one's

possessions in today's reading doesn't include the necessities such as our homes and our clothes like it might have for the rich man. The crowds listening to Jesus here aren't joining him on his ministry, they need to carry on living in their towns.

Secondly, the similarity: what are the two groups of people told to do with the money they raise from selling their possessions? The crowd is told to give alms, the rich man is told to give to the poor.

All the way through the Gospel of Luke, and in fact, the underlying narrative of the whole of the scriptures, is how we are to treat our fellow humans. God, the God of Israel, revealed in Jesus of Nazareth, has constantly been telling us that we're *missing the point*.

The point is not how closely the Israelites followed the Law or how many sacrifices were made, it is not how carefully we administer the chalice, or how cleverly one can write a sermon... as we saw in the reading from Isaiah today, all of that means nothing to God if our hearts are not in the right place. And it is clear what God needs from us: In Isaiah 1.17, God needs us to seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

God wants us to look after our vulnerable people.

So how does this all fit with what comes next? Luke's story of Jesus continues with his image of the watchful servants who are ready for their master to come home, with their clothes girded and their lamps lit. It is clear by Luke's use of the Greek language that he sees Jesus as this master. The Master is eager to reward the servants who are ready by turning the paradigm upside-down: The Master serves the servants. He sits the servants down to a meal which he then serves.

This role reversal is a foreshadowing of Jesus' words after the last supper in ch. 22 in which Jesus proclaims: "I am among you as one who serves." The part we skip in the lectionary (between this week and next) is the disciples asking Jesus if he is telling this story for them, or for the crowd. The answer to which is both. He expands the illustration by describing a manager who is put in charge of his Master's household. When the master is delayed, the manager takes advantage of his situation and abuses his station and the workers by beating them and keeping an unfair share of the rations. He eats and drinks and gets drunk, while his co-workers go hungry and thirsty; a stark contrast to the nourishing banquet the master offers. This is a person who has knowingly, willingly abandoned their

responsibility and begun to abuse their position of power. As a result, the manager is not ready for the Master to arrive who sees what the manager is doing and he is dealt with harshly.

It is easy to get stuck there, with the image of a harsh judgement, to start worrying again. But let's come back to today's reading...

The image of God we are handed today is one of care and a God who comes looking to bless, a God who in *good pleasure* wants to give us a share in the kingdom! In fact, already has!

Selling our possessions creates space; not worrying about our 1st world luxuries frees up our resources, releasing the need to worry like Billy Connolly. It frees our Heads, our Hearts, our Hands to notice where the need is and do something about it.

It allows us to treasure the dignity of our fellow humans, rather than our possessions.

That is what the kingdom of God is like and we can help to bring it about now. This community is helping to bring it about now.

As I get to know you, I see how far the circle of love extends. All the ways you are helping to look after the vulnerable both here and further afield. Look at your work with the Sea-Farer's Mission, the work of the Mother's Union. This week, I found out that there is a breakfast for disadvantaged people in the park that is supported by the parish, the pastoral care that is offered not only to our parishioners, but also to patients in hospitals and nursing home residents. This loving care is extended to the *earth* itself. All this is evidence of priorities being put in order, of a freeing of 1st world worries – and therefore resources – that allows us to support these ministries.

God comes looking to bless. And given the welcome I have felt here and seen extended to each visitor that arrives, the care you have for one another, *grounded* in the blessing we offer to each other as part of our worship each week. The blessing you *are*, shows the blessing of God.

Because you know to whom you belong, you are ready and are inspired to serve, just like Jesus did.

Thank you and Amen!